

The Making of a New Shroud Documentary by Mark Guscin

This summer I was working on a new Shroud documentary, filming in France and Italy. The main topic of the film is the supposed inscriptions on the cloth – anyone who has read my articles in the BSTS and www.shroud.com concerning this aspect of Shroud studies will know my opinion thereof very well. In my opinion, they are just a figment of the imagination, from looking at the 1931 Enrie photographs of the Shroud, which were lit by raking light and therefore show up all the creases and imperfections in the cloth, giving rise to all kinds of objects that can be “seen” on the linen.

Anyway, what I really wanted to write about here is my meeting with Professor Luigi Garlaschelli, who in 2010 claimed to have reproduced a perfect copy of the Shroud, thereby proving that it is a fake. There are sufficient articles (again, on www.shroud.com) expressing valid doubts about Garlaschelli’s claims – in other words, he has not actually shown that the Shroud is a fake, there is no doubt about that – and yet in many ways I can understand his desire to do so. There is so much pseudo-science published about the Shroud, so much pro-authenticity junk; although in the end, I realise that the anti-authenticity sceptic groups contradict each other much more than Shroudies do, and their claims are much more unfounded and unscientific.

The example at hand concerns the “inscriptions”. A garbled mess of pseudo-Latin, pseudo-Greek and pseudo-Aramaic using theological ideas and titles that were coined later than the death of Christ, but claimed by some to be proof of the Shroud’s authenticity. Professor Garlaschelli did an excellent job with a practical demonstration of how unlikely (if not impossible) it is for the random letters some can see to have been imprinted onto the Shroud in the way they are “seen”.

I was also shown his series of Shroud replicas (see Figure 1 in the centre pages), including the one he claims debunks the Turin cloth; in which case it should be a 100% perfect replica, reproducing 100% of the Shroud’s properties (nothing less than 100% is good enough if a claim is made to have replicated the original). And despite appearances, this is most definitely not the case. Garlaschelli is at least aware that the image is not due to the application of pigment; his process starts with the application of pigment, which is then removed “in a washing machine”. To my mind a huge problem is the application of blood; as is well known, the lack of body image under the bloodstains where the two coincide show that the blood (which was transferred onto the cloth by direct contact) was already present on the linen before the body image was formed. When asked about this, Garlaschelli was honest enough to say that he simply has not addressed this issue; he just painted some stains on after obtaining the image. Surely this in itself shows that his model is not a bone fide replica.

But there is more. While the filming crew were setting up the lights I suddenly found myself between the cloth and a bright light. I recalled the simple experiment that shows how the body image on the Shroud of Turin contains no added material; when lit

from the back the body image disappears from view, leaving only the bloodstains visible (this is quite logical as the bloodstains do indeed contain added material – blood). I asked the cameraman to leave the light there for a minute, whipped my camera out and took a picture: the result shows that the body image is still visible on the Garlaschelli Shroud copy (see Figure 2 in the centre pages). Despite the supposed removal of the pigment in a washing machine, the body image on this copy contains added material. Once again, the origins of the mysterious image elude us and prove to be (so far at least) an unsolvable enigma for science today.

Shroud sceptics are not the only ones to try and reproduce the image with science; Professor Giulio Fanti of the University of Padua tries to show that the Shroud image is due to a corona discharge. He subjected a piece of linen draped over a clay reproduction of the Shroud body to exceedingly high voltage, so much so that we could not come within four or five metres of the machinery. After a whole day exposed to this discharge, the linen fabric was certainly coloured in the area of the arms, especially when viewed under ultraviolet light. It was by no means a body image as we see on the Shroud, but as Professor Fanti pointed out, the work is still in its preliminary stages. We look forward with great interest to further developments, although as above, the mystery of the Shroud image is still very far from being solved.